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Turkish and Mongol Shamanism in the Middle Ages*

by JOHN ANDREW BOYLE

THE religious beliefs and practices of the Turks and Mongols have been studied almost exclusively on the basis of material collected during the past 200 years. The medieval sources, which present a picture of these peoples at a time when they were largely, and in some cases totally, unaffected by the influence of Christianity, Buddhism and Islam, have not been adequately exploited. Some of these sources — one thinks in particular of the accounts of their travels compiled by the Franciscan friars John de Plano Carpini and William of Rubruck and the Venetian merchant Marco Polo — are of course readily accessible; but many of the Arabic, Persian and Chinese authorities are still available only in the original language or, if translations do exist, they are either old and unreliable or else buried in the files of specialist journals. In the following remarks upon certain aspects of Turkish and Mongol shamanism in the Middle Ages I have drawn upon all these sources, but more particularly upon the Muslim historians and geographers.

We may begin by considering the etymology and meaning of the word *shaman*. It is not, as we are told in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*¹, 'of Mongol origin': it is the name given to the practitioners of shamanism amongst the Tungusic peoples of Eastern Siberia²; it was applied by the Russians to those who practised similar arts or techniques amongst the Turks and Mongols, and was adopted by the anthropologists and historians

* The text of a paper read to the Folklore Society on 17 May, 1972.

¹ s.v. *Shamanism*.

² For the various forms of the word in the different languages see Uno Harva, *Die religiösen Vorstellungen der altaischen Völker* (Helsinki, 1938), p. 449. It is ultimately derived from the Sanskrit *śramana* (Prakrit *samana*) 'religious mendicant, Buddhist ascetic' through the Chinese *sha-mên*.

of religion as a technical term to describe the possessors of similar or analogous powers, wherever they were found, in the Old and the New World. The Turks call their shamans *qam* and the Mongols *bö'ε* (*bö*). It is not without significance that the latter word is derived from the Turkish (*bögiü*, 'sage, wizard'³) and that the medieval writers, Christian and Muslim, apply the Turkish word *qam* to the Mongol shamans.

What is a shaman? According to Kroeber,⁴ dealing with the phenomenon in Native America, he 'is an individual without official authority but often of great influence. His supposed power comes to him from the spirits as a gift or grant. . . . His communion with the spirits enables the shaman to foretell the future, change the weather, blast the crops or multiply game, avert catastrophes or precipitate them on foes; above all, to inflict or cure disease. He is therefore the medicine-man; a word which in American ethnology is synonymous with shaman. The terms doctor, wizard, juggler, which have established themselves in usage in certain regions, are also more or less appropriate: they all denote shamans.' On the other hand Eliade⁵ deprecates the 'habit of using the terms "shaman", "medicine man", "sorcerer" and "magician" interchangeably to designate certain individuals possessing magico-religious powers and found in all primitive societies'. 'Magic and magicians', he says,⁶ 'are to be found more or less all over the world, whereas shamanism exhibits a particular speciality . . . : "mastery over fire", "magical flight", and so on', the shaman's chief characteristic being his faculty of going into 'a trance during which his soul is believed to leave his body and ascend to the sky and descend to the underworld'.

To the medieval observers the *qam* (to use the Turkish word) was above all a seer or soothsayer, a foreteller of the future. Maḥmūd al-Kāshgharī, who composed a Turkish-Arabic lexicon in the second half of the eleventh century, gives as the Arabic equivalent of *qam* the word *kāhin*, which bears exactly this meaning.⁷

³ Sir Gerard Clauson, *An Etymological Dictionary of Pre-Thirteenth Century Turkish* (Oxford, 1972), p. 324.

⁴ A. L. Kroeber, *Anthropology* (London, 1923), pp. 363-364.

⁵ Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (New York, 1964), p. 3.

⁶ p. 5.

⁷ Clauson, p. 625, s.v. *ka:m*.

William of Rubruck,⁸ confusing the word *qam* with *qan* 'ruler', remarks: 'All soothsayers (*divinatores*) are called *cham*, and so are all their princes called *cham*, because the government of the people depends on divination.' In the chapter⁹ specially devoted to the Mongol shamans Rubruck calls them *divini*. He refers here to their medical functions: '... when anyone sickens they are called, and they repeat their incantations, and tell whether it is a natural malady or one resulting from witchcraft'.¹⁰ To Juvainī (1226–1283), the historian of the Mongol invasion, who like Rubruck had visited Mongolia and passed some time at Qara-Qorum, the *qams* were 'experts in the science of magic'; he too speaks of their treating the sick.¹¹ The anonymous author of the 10th-century Persian geography known as the *Ḥudūd al-'Ālam*, or 'Regions of the World', actually refers to the shamans of the Ghuzz Turks, the later Türkmen or Turcomans, as 'physicians', using the Arabic word *ṭabīb* and the Persian word *pījishk*: '(The Ghūz) greatly esteem the physicians ... and, whenever they see them, venerate them ... and these doctors have command over their lives ... and property. ...' ¹² Finally, in the *Codex Cumanicus*, a handbook of Coman or Qipchaq Turkish compiled in the Crimea at the beginning of the fourteenth century, *qam qatun* 'lady *qam*' renders the Latin *incantatrix* 'sorceress', but the corresponding abstract noun *qamlīq* occurs in the verbal phrase *qamlīq et*-rendering *addivinare* 'to prophesy', so that here too prognostication would seem to have been the main function of the *qam*.¹³

Apart from occurrences in certain early Turkish texts,¹⁴ the

⁸ *The Journey of William of Rubruck to the Eastern Parts of the World*, transl. W. W. Rockhill (London, 1900), p. 108; see also *The Mongol Mission*, ed. Christopher Dawson (London, 1955), p. 121.

⁹ Rockhill, pp. 239–247; Dawson, pp. 197–201.

¹⁰ Rockhill, p. 242; Dawson, p. 198.

¹¹ Aṭā-Malik Juvainī, *History of the World-Conqueror*, transl. J. A. Boyle (Manchester, 1958), p. 59.

¹² *Ḥudūd al-'Ālam*, transl. V. Minorsky (London, 1937), p. 100.

¹³ See K. Grønbech, *Komanisches Wörterbuch* (Copenhagen, 1942), pp. 191 and 192. The *Codex Cumanicus* is, as Sir Gerard Clauson points out in a letter dated the 12th May, 1972, a composite work. It was compiled by, or for, a group of Italian merchants at, or perhaps slightly before, the beginning of the 14th century and was later acquired by German Franciscan missionaries, who made extensive additions to it. Among these later additions is *kam katun* 'sorceress', while the phrase *kamlīq et*- 'to prophesy' occurs in the earlier text. The merchants, Sir Gerard adds, compiled a Latin vocabulary and then found Coman translations for it; the missionaries collected Coman words and noted their meanings.

¹⁴ See Clauson, p. 625, s.v. *ka:m*. and p. 628, s.v. *kamla*..

earliest recording of the word *qam* is in the Chinese Annals of the T'ang dynasty (618–906), where it is stated that the Kirghiz called their shamans (in Chinese *wu*) *kam*, such being the ancient pronunciation of the Chinese character which is now pronounced *kan*.¹⁵ The Kirghiz, who have given their name to the Soviet Socialist Republic of Kirgizia, lived at this time much further to the east, along the upper reaches of the Yenisei. According to both the Chinese and the Muslim sources they had red (i.e. blond) hair and green (i.e. blue) eyes, and these anthropological characteristics have led some scholars to suggest that they originally spoke an Indo-European language; for the same reasons the eleventh-century Persian historian Gardīzī claims that their ruling class was originally Slav.¹⁶ In fact the T'ang history makes it clear that they were Turkish-speaking in the 10th century A.D.; and if, as is generally agreed, they are identical with the Ko-k'un, one of the tribes conquered by the Huns in the 2nd century B.C., they are perhaps one of the earliest Turkish-speaking peoples of which we have knowledge. Both Gardīzī and a slightly later writer, Marvazī, supply us with interesting details on the Kirghiz *qam*, whom they call *faghīnūn*, a corruption of a Sogdian word meaning 'God's prophet'.¹⁷ 'Among the Khirkhīz' — I quote from Minorsky's translation of Marvazī¹⁸ — 'is a man, a commoner, called *faghīnūn*, who is summoned on a fixed day every year; about him there gather singers and players and so forth, who begin drinking and feasting. When the company is well away, this man faints and falls as if in a fit; he is asked about all the events that are going to happen in the coming year, and he gives information whether (crops) will be plentiful or scarce, whether there will be rain or drought, and so forth, and they believe that what he says is true'.

This is probably the earliest reference to a shamanic trance. I know of only one other reference in medieval Muslim literature.

¹⁵ N. Y. Bichurin (Iakinf), *Sobranie svedenii o narodakh obitavshikh v Srednei Azii v drevnie vremena* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1950), I, 353.

¹⁶ Bichurin, I, 351; W. Barthold, *Histoire des Turcs d'Asie Centrale* (Paris, 1945), pp. 26–27; Gardīzī, *Zain al-Akhbār*, ed. A. Habibi (Tehran, 1347/1968), pp. 260–261.

¹⁷ Dr I. Gershevitch, in a letter dated the 8th May, 1971, suggests that an original **vaghvēwan* from *vagh* 'God' and *vēwan* 'prophet' was changed by metathesis into **vaghēvwan*; this, in the Arabic script, became **faghēfwān*, of which *faghīnūn* (*faghēnūn*) is a corruption.

¹⁸ *Sharaf al-Zamān Ṭāhir Marvazī on China, the Turks and India* (London, 1942), p. 30.

It is to be found in the *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī*, a universal history written in India in 1260 by Minhāj al-Dīn Jūzjānī, one of our main sources for the Mongol invasions. In a famous passage¹⁹ in which he gives a description — the only one that has come down to us — of the personal appearance of Genghis Khan, Jūzjānī goes on to remark that the Conqueror 'was an adept in magic and deception, and some of the devils were his friends. Every now and again he used to fall into a trance, and in that state of insensibility all sorts of things used to proceed from his tongue, and that state of trance used to be similar to that which had happened to him at the outset of his rise, and the devils who had power over him foretold his victories. The tunic and clothes which he had on and wore on the first occasion were placed in a trunk and he was wont to take them about with him. Whenever this inspiration came over him, every circumstance — victories, undertakings, the appearance of enemies, the defeat and reduction of countries — anything which he might desire, would all be uttered by his tongue. A person used to take the whole down in writing and enclose it in a bag and place a seal upon it, and when Chingiz Khān came to his senses again, they used to read his utterances over to him one by one; and according to these he would act, and more or less, indeed, the whole used to come true.'

The 'technique of ecstasy' is thus attested amongst both Turks and Mongols. For the shamanic specialities of 'magical flight', and 'mastery over fire' we find evidence only amongst the Mongols. Both of these faculties are attributed to Teb-Tengri, the shaman who presided over Genghis Khan's rise to power and conferred upon him the title (Chingiz-Khan) by which he is known to history. 'It was his custom', Rashīd al-Dīn²⁰ tells us, 'to give news of hidden things and future matters and to say: "God speaks with me, and I go up to heaven".' And he rejects as 'vulgar exaggeration and lying' the claim made by Mongols of all classes that Teb-Tengri 'used to ascend to heaven mounted on a white horse'.²¹ As to 'mastery over fire', i.e. 'insensibility to heat, and, hence, the "mystical heat" that renders both extreme cold and the temperature

¹⁹ Transl. H. G. Raverty (London, 1881), II, 1077-1078. I have made some slight modifications on the basis of Habibi's edition of the text (Kabul, 1964).

²⁰ Rashīd al-Dīn, *Sbornik letopisei*, I/1, transl. L. A. Khetagurov (Moscow/Leningrad, 1952), p. 167.

²¹ *Ibid.*

of burning coals supportable',²² this faculty was possessed both by Teb-Tengri and by Qutula, a great-uncle of Genghis Khan. Of Teb-Tengri we are told by Juvaini²³ how he had 'heard from trustworthy Mongols that during the severe cold that prevails in those regions he used to walk naked through the desert and the mountains'. 'It was his custom', says Rashīd al-Dīn²⁴ 'in the heart of winter in Onan-Kelüren,²⁵ which is the coldest of those countries, to sit naked in the middle of a frozen river, and from the heat of his body the ice would melt and steam would rise from the water.'²⁶ His resistance to cold was matched by Qutula's resistance to heat. On winter nights the Mongol Khan, so Rashīd al-Dīn tells us²⁷ on the authority of the native bards, would throw whole trees upon the fire and lie down beside it. As the wood burnt through the embers would fall upon him and scorch his skin, but he would pay no attention. And if he woke for a moment from his sleep he would think he had been bitten by an insect and would scratch himself and drop off again.

If we find no similar evidence of the phenomena of 'magical flight' and 'mastery over fire' amongst the heathen Turks, this may well be due to the inadequacy of the sources. On the other

²² Eliade, p. 335.

²³ *History of the World-Conqueror*, p. 39.

²⁴ *Sbornik letopisei*, I/1, 167.

²⁵ i.e. the region between the Onan (Onon) and the Keltüren (Kerulen) in what is to-day N.E. Mongolia and the Chita region of Siberia. The expression was known to William of Rubruck: 'The district in which they [i.e. the Mongols] first were and where the orda of Chingis Chan is still, is called Onankerule.' See Dawson, p. 123, also pp. 148 and 170.

²⁶ Cf. the Tibetan initiatory ordeal in which the candidate is required, 'during a winter night snowstorm, to dry a large number of soaked sheets directly on his naked body'. See Eliade, p. 437 and note 37. Eliade also refers to instances of 'magical heat' in Indo-European heroic myths and cites (p. 476) the story of how the youthful Cú Chulainn was so 'heated' after his first exploit that 'he was placed in three vats of cold water to quench the ardour of his wrath. The first vat into which the boy was put burst its staves and hoops like the breaking of a nutshell about him. As for the second vat, the water would seethe several handbreadths high in it. As for the third vat (the water grew hot in it, so that) one man might endure it while another would not. Thereupon the boy's wrath abated and his garments were put on him'. See *Táin Bó Cúadnge* ed. Cecile O'Rahilly (Dublin, 1967), p. 171. 'Magical heat' was also a peculiarity of the *Cei of Culhwch and Olwen*, the Sir Kay of later romance: '... when the rain was heaviest, a handbreadth before his hand and another behind his hand what would be in his hand would be dry, by reason of the greatness of his heart; and when the cold was hardest on his comrades that would be to them kindling to light a fire'. See *The Mabinogion* transl. Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones (London, 1949), p. 107.

²⁷ *Sbornik letopisei*, I/2, transl. O. I. Smirnova (Moscow/Leningrad, 1952), p. 51.

hand, the process of purification by fire, one of the functions of the shamans, is attested as early as the 6th century. We are told by the Byzantine historian Menander Protector²⁸ that Zemarchus, the envoy of the Emperor Justin II (565–578) to Eshtemi, the ruler of the Western T'u-chüeh, was met on the frontiers of the latter's territories, probably somewhere west of modern Kazakhstan, by persons who announced themselves as 'conjurers away of evil omens'. These exorcists — and here we have the first account of shamanic activities in Western literature — took 'all the baggage of the party (and) set it down in the middle. They then began ringing a bell and beating a kind of drum over the baggage, whilst some ran round it carrying leaves of burning incense, flaming and crackling, and raged about like maniacs, gesticulating as if repelling evil spirits. Carrying on this exorcism of evil as they considered it, they made Zemarchus himself also pass through the fire, and in the same manner they appeared to perform an act of purification for themselves.' We have no further records of such a ceremony until the period of Mongol domination in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, when we find ample evidence of the practice at the courts of the various rulers. John de Plano Carpini and his companions brought a gift of 40 beaver skins and 80 badger skins to Batu, the founder of the Golden Horde. The skins, we are told by Friar Benedict the Pole, one of Carpini's companions, were carried by Batu's servants 'between the two sacred fires, and the Friars were obliged to do likewise, since it is the custom of the Tartars to purify envoys and presents by fire'.²⁹ The envoys of Louis IX were subjected to the same treatment in the court of Oghul-Qaimish, the widow of the Great Khan Güyük (1246–1248). There was, as Rubruck³⁰ explains, a two-fold reason for this: they were the bearers of gifts and the gifts were intended for someone who was already dead, i.e. Güyük. Everything and everybody connected with the dead had to be purified by fire. The process is described in detail by Carpini³¹: 'They make two fires and they put two spears near the fires, with a rope fastened on to the top of them, on to which they tie strips of buckram; under this rope

²⁸ Quoted by Sir Henry Yule, *Cathay and the Way Thither*, I (London, 1915), p. 208.

²⁹ Dawson, p. 80.

³⁰ Dawson, p. 198.

³¹ Dawson, p. 14.

and its ribbons and between the two fires pass men, women, animals and dwellings. And there are two women, one this side, the other that, who sprinkle water and recite incantations. If any carts break down there, or if anything falls to the ground on that spot, the enchanter (*incantatores*) get it.' This last detail is confirmed by Rubruck,³² who had seen these rites performed on the *ordo* of a wife of the Great Khan who had died during his stay in the Mongol capital. Such purification seems to have been particularly necessary in the case of the survivors and belongings of anyone struck by lightning. The ceremony appears to have been continued in Persia under the Il-Khans. In a note which Buscarello Ghisolfi, the ambassador in 1289 of the Il-Khan Arghun, presented along with his master's letters to Philip the Fair, he passes on a complaint from Arghun that Philip's ambassadors had refused to make the genuflections expected before a Mongol prince. He requests the King to instruct any future ambassadors to conform with Mongol usages but adds that they would not be required to pass between two fires.³³ We hear of the ceremony for the last time in the reign of Arghun's second son and fourth successor Öljeitü (1304-1316). A building in which he was spending the night was struck by lightning during a violent storm, and several of his relations were killed. It was put to him by some of his high officers that he ought to purify himself, in accordance with the Mongol custom and the *yasa* of Genghis Khan, by passing between fires; and *bakhshis*, i.e. apparently *qams*, were produced to perform the ritual.³⁴ Whether Öljeitü, a convert to Islam, actually submitted to this pagan practice is not explicitly stated.

A faculty of the shaman mentioned by Kroeber but not by Eliade is his power to change the weather. This magical process as practised by the Turks, and at a later stage by the Mongols, was known as *yat* or *yad*, out of which the Mongols made *jada*.³⁵ Kāshgharī, in whose dictionary the term occurs for the first time, describes *yat* as 'a kind of shamanism (*kahāna*) that is practised with special stones whereby rain, wind, etc. are attracted'.³⁶ 'It

³² Dawson, p. 198.

³³ J. B. Chabot, 'Notes sur les relations du roi Argoun avec l'Occident', *Revue de l'Orient Latin*, II (1894), pp. 566-629 (610).

³⁴ *Cambridge History of Iran*, V (Cambridge, 1968), p. 402.

³⁵ Clauson, p. 883, s.v. *ya:t* (-d).

³⁶ B. Atalay, *Divanü Lûgat-it-Türk Tercümesi* (Ankara, 1941), III, 3.

is', says Rashīd al-Dīn³⁷, 'a kind or sorcery carried out with various stones, the property of which is that when they are taken out, placed in water, and washed, wind, cold, snow, rain and blizzards at once appear even though it is in the middle of summer.' The belief that certain stones, when dipped in or sprinkled with water, can be used to produce rain is of course by no means confined to Central and Northern Asia: the belief and the practice are to be found in Africa, Australia, the New World and even 'in the cool air and under the grey skies of Europe'.³⁸ Frazer is referring here to the Fountain of Barenton in the Forest of Brocéliande, of which we can now read in the late Mrs N. K. Chadwick's *Early Brittany*.³⁹ She quotes the account of the fountain by the Norman poet Wace, who had made a journey to Brittany to see the wonders of the forest with his own eyes. 'The fountain of Berenton', he says, 'rises from beneath a stone there. Thither the hunters are used to repair in sultry weather; and drawing water with their horns, they sprinkle the stone for the purpose of having rain, which is then wont to fall, they say, throughout the forest around; but why I know not.'⁴⁰ Barenton was identified by the Bretons with the magical spring in the story which has come down to us in two versions: the *Lady of the Fountain* in the *Mabinogion* and the poem *Yvain* by Chrétien de Troyes.⁴¹ In the Welsh version Cynon son of Clydno (the Calogrenant of *Yvain*) tells how following the instructions of the black man in the forest he came to a great tree, beneath which was a fountain with a marble slab beside it, and on the slab, a silver bowl fastened to it with a chain. 'And I took up the bowl', he says, 'and threw a bowlful of water over the slab; and thereupon lo, a peal of thunder coming, far greater than the black man had said, and after the peal the shower. And I was sure, Cei, that neither man nor beast of those the shower overtook would escape with his life. For never a hailstone of it would stop for skin or flesh, till bone checked it.'⁴² The hero of

³⁷ *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, transl. J. A. Boyle (New York and London, 1971), pp. 36-37.

³⁸ J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (Abridged Edition, London, 1922), p. 76.

³⁹ Cardiff, 1969. The final chapter (pp. 292-354) is devoted to the forest. For a description of the spring as it is to-day see p. 334.

⁴⁰ Chadwick, p. 300.

⁴¹ On the relationship between the two versions see now R. L. Thomson, *Owain or Chwedyl Iarlles y Ffynmawr* (Dublin, 1968), pp. xxiv-xcvii.

⁴² *The Mabinogion*, p. 160.

the story, Owain son of Urien (the Yvain of Chrétien de Troyes), a historical person who had fought against the Anglian invaders of Northumbria,⁴³ repeats the process and raises a storm in precisely the same way, as does Cei also in a later stage of the story. The fountain has been described by Loomis⁴⁴ as a blending into one of 'a loch in Ulster, a spring in one of St Brendan's isles, a fay-haunted fountain in Lothian, and the storm-making spring of Berenton in Brittany'. To these should perhaps be added the prototype of Barenton, some nameless British spring or lake with a magical stone upon its banks or in its waters; for it is of course in the stone, and not in the spring, that the magical qualities reside. Such magic was associated in modern times with Llyn Dulyn on the eastern slopes of Carnedd Llywelyn in Snowdonia. According to a tradition which goes back to the sixteenth century 'there is a causeway of stones leading into this lake; and if any one goes along this causeway, even when it is hot sunshine, and throws water so as to wet the furthest stone, which is called the Red Altar, it is a chance if it do not rain before night'.⁴⁵

Compared with this scanty and mainly legendary evidence for the use of some kind of rain-stone in Europe the information in the medieval Arabic and Persian sources about the practice amongst the heathen and Muslim Turks is copious and circumstantial. There are two versions of how they first came to be possessed of this art. The better known version is given by Gardīzī,⁴⁶ apparently on the ultimate authority of Ibn al-Muqaffa', a Persian Zoroastrian, who flourished in the 8th century and of whose numerous works there has survived little except the *Book of Kalīla and*

⁴³ See R. S. Loomis (ed.), *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages* (Oxford 1959), p. 49.

⁴⁴ R. S. Loomis, *Arthurian Tradition and Chrétien de Troyes* (New York, 1949), p. 293.

⁴⁵ The tradition is recorded in the *Greaf* for 1805 on the authority of Thomas Prys the poet of Plas Iolyn in Denbighshire (1564?–1634) and John Davies the genealogist of Rhiwlas, Llansilin, also in Denbighshire (1652–post 1721). The passage was translated by Lady Charlotte Guest in the notes to her version of the *Mabinogion* (London, 1838–49), I, 226, and by Sir John Rhys in his *Celtic Heathendom* (London and Edinburgh, 1888), pp. 185–186; it is quoted by Frazer, p. 76, on the authority of Rhys. The stepping stones have long since disappeared under the waters of the lake. In 1879, under powers contained in the Llandudno Improvement Act 1876, a dam was constructed to convert Llyn Dulyn into a reservoir, and as a result the normal level of the water was raised by 11 feet. I am indebted for this latter information to the courtesy of Mr J. M. Campbell, Engineer and Manager of the Conway Valley Water Board.

⁴⁶ Ed. Habibi, p. 256.

Dimna.⁴⁷ After the subsidence of the flood Noah divided up the world amongst his sons, giving to Japhet as his share the lands of the Turks, the Slavs and Gog and Magog up to China; and he prayed to God to teach Japhet a spell such that, when he pronounced it, rain would fall. When Japhet had learned the spell he wrote it on a stone, which he suspended about his neck so as not to forget it. Whenever he asked for rain with that spell rain would come; and if he thrust the stone into water and gave that water to a sick person he would recover from his sickness. In the course of time the stone was handed down to his descendants such as the Ghuzz, the Khalaj and the Khazar. They quarrelled over their heirloom, which had come to be in the possession of the Ghuzz, and it was agreed that on a certain day they should cast lots to decide which people should have it. The Ghuzz then took another, exactly similar stone and engraved the spell on it; and their chief suspended it about his neck. On the appointed day the lots were duly cast and the stone fell to the Khalaj, who were however fobbed off with the false stone, whilst the original stone of Japhet remained with the Ghuzz. And that, Gardīzī concludes, is why the Turks seek for rain with a stone. The other, perhaps older, version⁴⁸ is to be found in the work of the thirteenth-century geographer Yāqūt,⁴⁹ who recounts it on the authority of one Abu'l-'Abbās 'Īsā ibn Muḥammad al-Marwazī, who lived in the time of the Sāmānid ruler Ismā'il ibn Aḥmad (892–907). A Ghuzz prince told Abu'l-'Abbās's informant how one of his ancestors, having quarrelled with his father, journeyed eastward until he came to a land of which he was told by its inhabitants that it was impossible to pass beyond it, the way being barred by a mountain. 'The sun', they said, 'rises behind this mountain, and it is very near to the earth and falls upon nothing without burning it.' The prince's ancestor asked: 'Are there any people or animals there?' 'Yes', they

⁴⁷ This Arabic translation of a Middle Persian version (now lost) of the collection of Indian fables known in Europe as the Fables of Bidpai was the channel through which they were transmitted to the West.

⁴⁸ It contains, it is true, no reference to Noah or Japhet; on the other hand it has borrowed from the Alexander Romance (or rather the *Christian Legend concerning Alexander*) the story of the land of the rising sun and its troglodyte inhabitants. Four centuries later this story was heard by Carpini and his companions amongst the Mongols. See Dawson, pp. 24–25, also R. A. Skelton, Thomas E. Marston and George D. Painter, *The Vinland Map and the Tartar Relation* (New Haven and London, 1965), p. 64.

⁴⁹ *Mu'jam al-Buldān* (Beirut ed., 1955–1957), II, 24–25.

replied. He asked: 'How can they live there in the conditions which you have described?' They replied: 'As for the people, they have passages under the ground and caves in the mountains, and when the sun rises they go into them and stay there until the sun moves away from them, and then they come out. As for the animals, they pick up stones of which they have inspired knowledge, and each animal takes a stone in its mouth and raises its head towards the heavens and casts a shadow over them, and a cloud then appears and forms a screen between the animals and the sun.' The Turkish prince's ancestor entered that country and found it to be exactly as he had been told. He and his companions attacked the animals, collected the stones and took as many as they could carry back to their own country, where they have been ever since and where they are used for the producing of rain and snow.

It is Abu'l-'Abbās who provides the earliest record of the use of *yat* as a tactical device in warfare. He tells us a story that he had heard from the lips of Ismā'il ibn Aḥmad the Sāmānid and which he recounts in the ruler's own words.⁵⁰ In the course of a battle with the heathen Turks Ismā'il was approached by some of his Turkish attendants, who had been warned by their kinsmen in the infidel army of the arrival of a kind of soothsayer (*kāhin*) who, according to their belief, was able to produce clouds of hail, snow, etc. with which to attack anyone he wished to destroy. This soothsayer, they said, intended to cause a great hail-storm to fall on Ismā'il's army such that every man that was hit by the hailstones would be killed. Ismā'il rebuking them for clinging to their pagan superstitions, they retorted that they had warned him and that in the morning he would see for himself. Sure enough, next day at the break of dawn a great cloud appeared over the mountain at the foot of which Ismā'il's army was based, and it continued to spread and increase in size until it cast its shadow over the whole of the army. Alarmed at the blackness of the cloud and the frightful sounds that were proceeding from it Ismā'il got off his horse and prostrated himself in prayer, calling upon God for deliverance. He was still thus occupied, his face pressed to the ground, when his attendants and some of the soldiers came up with the news that all was well. He raised his head and saw that the cloud had moved away from his army and was now raining down great hailstones

⁵⁰ *Mu'jam al-Buldān*, II, 25-26.

upon the army of the Turks; their horses were terrified, and their tents uprooted, and such of them as had been hit by hailstones were either disabled or killed. His men asked Ismā'il whether they should attack, but he said, 'No, for God's punishment is subtler and more bitter.'

Kāshgharī witnessed the employment of *yat* for a more peaceful purpose. He was present in person on an occasion in the Yaghma country, i.e. in the Central or Northern Tien Shan, when, in the middle of summer, a fall of snow was produced by this means in order to put out a fire.⁵¹ The device was used by Sultan Jalāl al-Dīn, the last of the Khwārazm-Shāhs, shortly before his final defeat by the Mongols, his object being the more normal one of bringing an end to a drought. The story is told, not without humour, by the Sultan's secretary and biographer Muḥammad Nasawī.⁵² When Jalāl al-Dīn arrived at Valāsjird, a place near Akhlāt (the modern Ahlāt) in what is now Eastern Turkey, the local population complained about the violence of the heat, the lack of rain and the discomfort caused to man and beast by the flies. It was decided to produce rain with the aid of rain-stones. Nasawī remarks that he was at first highly sceptical about the efficacy of these stones but had to admit that on this, and on several other occasions, they really did produce the desired result. The Sultan supervised the operation in person. It was more successful than had been bargained for. Rain continued to fall day and night without interruption until the people of Valāsjird were heartily sick of the constant downpour and wished they had held their peace and let well alone. Moreover, it was so muddy underfoot that it was all but impossible to get to the Sultan's tent. One of his ladies voiced the feelings of everybody: 'O Lord of the World,' she is reported to have said, 'you would seem to have little skill in the practice of this art. That is why you have plagued the people with all this endless rain. Anyone else would have produced just as much rain as was needed.'⁵³

⁵¹ Clauson, p. 883, s.v. *ya:t* (-d); Atalay, III, 3.

⁵² *Histoire du Sultan Djelāl ed-Dīn Mankobirti*, ed. and transl. O. Houdas (Paris, 1891-5), text, pp. 237-238, transl. pp. 396-397. I follow the Arabic text as emended by my friend and colleague Dr J. D. Latham.

⁵³ For some extremely interesting information on the use of the rain-stone under Sultan Jalāl al-Dīn and his father Sultan 'Alā al-Dīn Muḥammad see E. Quatremère's translation of Rashīd al-Dīn, *Histoire des Mongols de la Perse* (Paris, 1836), pp. 432-434, where he quote from a 13th-century Arabic work on precious stones.

The Mongols appear to have learned the art of *yat*, or *jada* as they call it, from their Turkish neighbours.⁵⁴ The use of the rain-stone was apparently unknown to the Qitan or Khitai, a people closely related to the Mongols, who in the 10th century of our era founded a kingdom in Northern China: their name survives in the Cathay of Marco Polo and in Kitai, the Russian name for China. The annals of the Liao (i.e. Qitan) dynasty contain detailed references to their rain-making ceremonies. These included the drenching of individuals in water, standing in water (processes familiar from many parts of the world)⁵⁵ and the curious custom of shooting arrows at willow trees. The last-mentioned practice was one of the principal rites in what was known as the 'Sê-sê rain ceremony'.⁵⁶ Wittfogel and Fêng⁵⁷ in their admirable monograph on the Liao see in this 'a ceremony which may have symbolized birth after death' and refer to Frazer's chapter on the 'Killing of the Tree-Spirit'.⁵⁸ Had the Qitan made use of the rain-stone the Dynastic History of the Liao could hardly have failed to mention the fact. *Jada* was certainly known to the thirteenth-century Mongols, though they do not seem to have been versed themselves in this form of magic. It was employed against Genghis Khan in the Battle of Köiten (1202) by the Naiman, a tribe of Western Mongolia who were almost certainly Turks. The result was the same as in the battle described by Ismā'il the Sāmānid. The wind veered, and the blizzard which his enemies had raised against Genghis Khan turned back in their faces and so assured his victory.⁵⁹ Thirty years later in Northern China his youngest son Tolui made successful use of this device when his troops had been encircled by a Jürchen army; it is, however, specifically stated that, in order to effect the magical change of the weather, he secured the services of a Qangli Turk, 'who was well versed in the science of *yai*, that is the use of the rain-stone'.⁶⁰ The author of the *Altan Tobchi*,⁶¹ a Mongol

⁵⁴ But see below, p. 191, note 64.

⁵⁵ Frazer, pp. 69-71.

⁵⁶ Karl A. Wittfogel and Fêng Chia-Shêng, *History of Chinese Society: Liao (907-1125)* (Philadelphia, 1946), p. 267.

⁵⁷ Wittfogel and Fêng, p. 216.

⁵⁸ pp. 296 ff.

⁵⁹ R. Grousset, *L'Empire mongol* (Paris, 1941), pp. 112-113.

⁶⁰ Juvaini, *History of the World-Conqueror*, p. 193; Rashid al-Din, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, pp. 36-37. *yai* is a later form of *yat* (*yad*).

⁶¹ *The Mongol Chronicle Altan Tobchi*, ed. and transl. Charles Bawden (Wiesbaden, 1955), pp. 151-152. See also the review by Nicholas Poppe, *Central Asiatic Journal*, II (1956), pp. 309-313 (311 and note 4).

chronicle completed at the beginning of the seventeenth century, claims that *jada* was used by the son of Toghon-Temür, the last Mongol Emperor of China (1335-1370), against the Ming as they pursued the Mongols northwards into Mongolia. By this means he raised a great blizzard, in which the bulk of the enemy's men and horses were frozen to death. The survivors, fleeing towards the Great Wall, dug holes in the steppe such as the Mongols use as stoves when the wind will not allow the making of a fire on the surface; having no other fuel they burnt their spears shafts in a vain endeavour to keep warm and then died of exposure crouched in these 'fire-holes'. The story, though hardly in accordance with the historical facts, shows that *jada* was by that time regarded as a native Mongol practice. It had in fact been employed some years before by the Moghuls, i.e. the Mongols of the eastern half of the Chaghatai Khanate, in the aptly named Battle of the Mire (1365), when a cloudburst accompanied by thunder and lightning was produced to inflict a defeat on Timür or Tamerlane, then at the commencement of his career.⁶² A descendant of Tamerlane, Abū Sa'id, crossing the Hunger Steppe in the summer of 1451 and, wishing to alleviate the suffering of his troops from the heat and lack of water, commanded certain Uzbeks in his army to perform this same magic, with equally spectacular results.⁶³

In modern times there is abundant evidence of the knowledge and practice of *jada* amongst all the Mongolian peoples. The Buryat used a kind of red stone to produce cold and windy weather; there was also a certain root which, if wrenched or dug out of the ground, produced the same effect.⁶⁴ The red stone was presumably

⁶² Hilda Hookham, *Tamburlaine the Conqueror* (London, 1962), pp. 45-46.

⁶³ V. V. Barthold, *Four Studies on the History of Central Asia*, transl. V. and T. Minorsky, II (Leiden, 1958), p. 167.

⁶⁴ Harva, pp. 221-222. A practice which Harva records elsewhere (p. 153) as obtaining amongst the Buryat of the Irkutsk Region may conceivably be a survival from the time when the Mongols were still a forest people. The Buryat of this area, he says, worship certain stones which they believe to have fallen from the sky. There is such a stone near the town of Balagansk. The Buryat sacrifice to it in time of drought in order to obtain rain. It is white in colour and is believed to have fallen in the first place on to a high mountain, from which it was transferred to its present position. Amongst the Buryat of Kudinsk there is a smaller stone of this description in almost every village, where it is kept in a box, which is fastened to a pillar in the centre of the village. In the Balagansk district, where these stones are larger, they are usually placed on a wooden stand resting on four stakes. Every spring, in the hopes of obtaining a rainy and fruitful summer, the people sprinkle them with water and offer sacrifices to them. Harva's data are derived from articles by N. N. Agapitov and M. N. Khangalov written in 1883 and 1890.

a bezoar, such as was certainly used by the Kalmucks and in Outer Mongolia. The bezoar, which is a concretion found in the alimentary organs of certain ruminants, may well be the original rain-stone. It will be remembered that in the myth recorded by Abu'l-'Abbās the Turks are represented as obtaining the stone from certain animals which used to hold it in their mouths in order to protect themselves from the heat of the sun. However, stones of various kinds seem to have been employed at all periods. The Buddhist lama now takes over the rôle of the shaman. Pallas, the German naturalist (1741-1811) describes the ceremony as practised by the eighteenth-century Kalmucks. The secret of changing the weather was, they told him, largely a question of faith and a knowledge of the proper formulas. Even the Russians could practise the art provided they had been well instructed and performed the rites with suitable conviction. There were, however, two essential points to remember. In the first place, the art should never be practised during the winter, for fear of harming plants and animals, which would be a criminal act; and in the second place, it would be equally blameworthy to provoke too frequent rains and storms during the summer, seeing that this would lead to the breeding of swarms of worms and insects.⁶⁵ The late Father Antoine Mostaert, the eminent Mongolist, found the ceremony still surviving in the twentieth century amongst the Ordos Mongols in Inner Mongolia. The rain-stone they use is white and round and of the size of a pheasant's egg. The lamas who have been asked to 'invite' the rain proceed to a marshy spot. Here they dig down until they reach water and, having previously poured a little water into an earthenware bottle, they put the rain-stone in it and place the bottle in the little well they have dug so that the bottom of the bottle rests on the water. After this operation the lamas begin to pray. The prayers go on for three days and sometimes longer, and during these days of prayer those who have invited the lamas may neither smoke, drink spirits nor eat meat.⁶⁶ One is reminded of the Catholic priests who used, in times of drought, to lead processions to the Fountain of Barenton, where they would dip a cross into the water in a Christian modification

⁶⁵ See Quatremère, p. 435.

⁶⁶ A. Mostaert, 'Matériaux ethnographiques relatifs aux Mongols Ordos' *Central Asiatic Journal*, II (1956), 241-294 (291-292).

of the old heathen ceremony.⁶⁷ As for the knights who drew water from that other — perhaps mythical — fountain and threw it over the marble slab beside it, producing a hail-storm of such violence that it destroyed every ‘man or beast of those it found out of doors’,⁶⁸ is it too fanciful to see in them the reflection of British or Pictish wizards who, like the Turkish shamans with their *yat*, employed their magic upon the battle-field to call down the wrath of the heavens upon their enemies?

⁶⁷ ‘Such a procession, followed by an immense crowd, took place in the exceptional drought of 1835, when the Rector of Concoret blessed the spring, plunged the foot of the cross into it, sprinkled the *perron de Merlin* and the assistants, “whereupon”, we are assured, “a violent thunderstorm arose, and the rain fell with such violence that the crowd had to disperse”. The last official procession to Barenton took place as late as 1925.’ (N. K. Chadwick, *Early Brittany*, p. 335).

⁶⁸ *The Mabinogion*, p. 161.